

BADLANDS COLA - 104 - “THE BIG DINOSAUR”

Content Warning: Badlands Cola is intended for a mature audience. Content warnings for each episode are available in the show notes and on our website, badlandscola.com. We recommend you check them out to ensure your listening experience is fun *and* safe. Thank you.

Pre-Roll: Hi, everyone, it's Renee again, the creator of Badlands Cola, and today I'm here to talk to you about something very important. On June 24th, the United States Supreme Court ruled to overturn Roe versus Wade. This stripped away the right for people in America to have a safe and legal abortion. Restricting access to comprehensive reproductive care, including abortion, threatens the health and independence of all people, which we have already seen with abortion bans in countries like Poland and Malta.

I encourage our audience, wherever you are, to learn more about what you can do to help at PodVoices.help. That's PodVoices.help.

And for those who might not know: Badlands Cola is a Canadian-run show. I know it's tempting to assume our Canadian reproductive rights would never be threatened like this, but this rhetoric exists here at home.

So, to our Canadian listeners: please, I encourage you to take action either by heading over to PodVoices.help, or by learning more about what you can do locally to help protect reproductive freedoms here in Canada.

Thank you, and take care.

SCENE 104.1

MUSIC THEME: "FEW COLOURS" BY OTNO. An ominous, building track featuring a wary electric guitar and the keens of a theremin.

STRATHCONA: Badlands Cola. Episode Four: The Big Dinosaur.

FADE IN.

INT. COMFORTINA MOTEL ROOM - MORNING - D3

The chirp of BIRDS outside and gentle TRAFFIC beyond the window of SUNNY's motel hints at morning, the sun already glaring hotly through the curtains. The RADIO remains on from the previous night, a welter of STATIC, dark and foreboding...

The signal CLEARS and BRIGHTENS, the in-progress MUSIC bumping along to a calm STRUMMING FOLK MUSIC. At song's end...

STRATHCONA: *(On radio)* You're listening to 101 FM, the Raptor. Non-stop hits of the 60s, 70s, and 80s. Got a request? Call in at 555-2323.

SUNNY: *(Waking up)* Mmnnf. Ugh. What time is it?

STRATHCONA: *(On radio)* Hey folks, pardon yet another interruption to this morning's programming, just a second...Sunny!

SUNNY: Huh? ...Oh god. *(Efforts: Grunting, lifting self out of bed)*

STRATHCONA: *(On radio)* If you can hear this, it's Strathcona; I need you to call into the radio station.

And, uh, back to folk hits of the 60s...

SUNNY: Oh, God. Strathcona...? You've got to be kidding me.

Another FOLKSY SONG plays on the radio, decidedly more somber. SUNNY stretches over the bed to CLAW their phone from the nightstand, then DIALS in the number from the radio. On the third RING, someone picks up.

STRATHCONA: *(Over the phone)* Oh good, you're up.

SUNNY: Dude. Dude! You're using *the radio* to get a hold of me?

STRATHCONA: Didn't know how else to reach you.

SUNNY: *(Sighing)* Just. What do you want? Thought you were happy never hearing my voice again. You know. After I saved your life.

STRATHCONA: Maybe I changed my mind. Turns out I want the same thing you want. I want to talk.

SUNNY: About what?

STRATHCONA: The Moons.

SUNNY: *(Pleasantly surprised)* Yes. Yes! Okay, good. Thank you, just let me get my notebook...

STRATHCONA: Hold up. This is a conditional conversation.

SUNNY: Yeah, yeah, I know what you're going to say. Listen, if the intel you give me is solid, I can put in a request with the department for an informant's award. I mean, this is just —

STRATHCONA: So you're working with the big city cops. All your intel goes straight to them?

SUNNY: *(Gritting teeth)* Eventually, yes. Right now, they need intel on someone we think might be related to Jasper Moon. His sister.

STRATHCONA: Well. Let's say Jasper does have a sister. You're gonna find her.

SUNNY: Look, I'm not really supposed to come into contact with the subject, just gather all the details I can about them without tipping them off and —

STRATHCONA: That wasn't a question. It's my condition.

SUNNY: *(Bitter laugh)* Let me think. No way in hell. Hard pass. I don't work for you.

STRATHCONA: You want intel on the Moon sister? I'll give it to you. On record and everything. But first, you help me find her. Do we have a deal?

SUNNY: So you're confirming her existence?

STRATHCONA: *Do we have a deal?*

SUNNY: ...Fine. Deal.

STRATHCONA: Great. Meet me in the big dinosaur.

The phone CLICKS as the line goes dead. The music slowly fades.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* Always the dinosaurs.

Between the strangeness of the request and the rude nature of my wake-up call, I almost forget to put on my wire beneath my shirt.

Almost.

FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE 104.2

FROM BLACK.

EXT. THE BIG DINOSAUR - MORNING - D3

The sweet BIRDSONG is drowned out by the outside HUBBUB of the town's busiest STREET. SUNNY ascends the METAL STAIRS that run along the spine of the world's largest dinosaur, the sounds of the town fading as the WIND picks up, and their own steps ECHO.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* So. The huge tacky dinosaur in the middle of town. Turns out you can still take the stairs up to the top of it. The railing is still covered in wads of gum, and the metal insides of the T. Rex's tunnel-like throat are still scratched over in a thousand adorable little vandalisms.

The sun hasn't started cooking up the town yet, and as I climb the dinosaur's spine, there's a cool morning breeze on the rise.

I look up, and grimace: standing at the mouth, leaning easy on one paint-peeled tooth, is my terrible new informant.

SUNNY: Really, the dinosaur? Was this necessary?

STRATHCONA: More than you know. Cool of you to show up so late, though.

SUNNY: (*Surly*) Sorry. My truck is still at that goddamn house.

STRATHCONA: Yeah, you should probably go get that. Hey, look, you've got a little piece of —

Unexpectedly, STRATHCONA reaches out and UNZIPS SUNNY's jacket, revealing their SECRET...

SUNNY: HEY! You can't just go around unzipping people's jackets!

STRATHCONA: (*Grumbling*) You know, I had a feeling you'd be wearing a wire, but I hate being right.

SUNNY: Look, dude, this is my job. Wires are standard operating procedure.

STRATHCONA: (*Unsympathetic*) I'm sure they are. And if you insist on wearing one, we're done.

The rummaging of CLOTHING, followed by the click of an unplugged wire.

SUNNY: Fine! Wire unplugged, see? Can we talk now?

STRATHCONA: As long as you keep it that way.

SUNNY: ...Does Jasper Moon have a sister?

STRATHCONA: Yes.

SUNNY: Shit. Okay, um. What's her name?

STRATHCONA: You're not going to find anything on her.

SUNNY: You know I don't just search up people's names and see how it shakes out, right? *Name.*

STRATHCONA: Mel. Melinda.

SUNNY scribbles notes in a notebook.

SUNNY: Melinda Moon. Damn, okay. She still alive?

STRATHCONA: *(Pause)* I...Probably. Haven't seen her around town in years.

SUNNY: Okay, okay. So she lived here, but moved away?

STRATHCONA: I guess. No idea where to.

SUNNY: Great. What's your relation to the Moons, then?

STRATHCONA: I went to school with Mel. We were friends.

SUNNY: What kind of friends?

STRATHCONA: I...I don't know. The kind that skipped gym class so they could go hang out at the electronics store?

SUNNY: ...What?

STRATHCONA: Yeah. The owner would let us steal his old broken radios and tinker with them until we could get them working again. That kind of friends.

SUNNY: And you have no idea where she went?

STRATHCONA: I told you, no. It's been like, fifteen years? More? You lose track of people. We just...grew up.

SUNNY: Okay, uh...What about Jasper Moon? Did he go to school with you two?

STRATHCONA: No. Too old.

SUNNY: Okay, and was Jasper close with Melinda, do you think?

STRATHCONA: He wasn't really around. Their parents were hardasses. Arms' length rich Boomer types, you know. Jasper watched out for Mel, maybe, but they weren't attached at the hip.

SUNNY: Would you say he was protective of her? Like, I don't know, *possessive* protective?

STRATHCONA: Excuse me?

SUNNY: Listen, the guy ran one of the nastiest cults this country's ever seen; and people like that? They tend to follow a pattern. I mean I tailed this asshole for three months and I wouldn't say he exactly broke the mould —

STRATHCONA: (*Overlapping*) Woah, hold on; you were part of his investigation too?

SUNNY: Yeah, let's just, uh...Can you just ignore I said that?

STRATHCONA: Wait, what do you know about him? What happened before the arrests?

SUNNY: No, nothing, let's just —

STRATHCONA: (*Overlapping*) Bullshit. The news said he's in custody; has he said anything? Have you *spoken* to him?

SUNNY: No! I know literally nothing, apart from the fact that he's incredibly dangerous, is directly or indirectly responsible for the deaths of at least four people, and is now...awaiting trial.

STRATHCONA: Jesus. Anything *else* you're keeping to yourself, or...?

SUNNY: Being secretive is part of the job, okay? Back to Melinda Moon: do you know if and when she started having any interaction with the cult?

STRATHCONA: (*Walls up.*) I don't.

SUNNY: Nothing at all?

STRATHCONA: Mel moved away, and then Jasper did too. I told you, I haven't seen either of them in years. Put that in your report.

SUNNY: I have, let's see...I have her name, and the fact that she exists; *that is hardly a report*. I need to know if she was ever involved with the cult.

STRATHCONA: *(Frosty)* Then maybe you'd better start asking around town. Or is that not "part of the job?"

SUNNY: So what, you're just ditching me?

STRATHCONA: No, I've just decided I'm going to go get some actual sleep...

STRATHCONA shoulders past SUNNY and begins making his way back down the ECHOING stairs.

SUNNY: Wait! Wait.

The FOOTSTEPS halt on the stairs.

SUNNY: Before you go: give me a contact at the Paleontology Centre. Whoever is telling you whether they're open or not. Anyone.

STRATHCONA returns, wary.

STRATHCONA: *(Beleaguered sigh)* Give me your phone.

STRATHCONA enters in a number, and hands their phone back to them.

STRATHCONA: There you go. Happy birthday, asshole. They barely talk to me, but I'm sure you'll win them over.

Rapid FOOTSTEPS carry SUNNY's informant back out to the morning.

STRATHCONA: Don't forget your truck; it's a long walk out to the centre, and *(shouting)* I'm not giving you a lift!

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* I'm not an asshole. I'm just doing my job. And if Strathcona thinks he's backed me into a corner, he's wrong. Half of my time as a private investigator might be spent sitting in dark cars, drinking cold coffee and scribbling notes, but that doesn't mean I'm afraid to butter up some locals and do the hard work face to face.

Most importantly, I put my wire right back on. And then I go rescue my truck.

I ignore the fact that the derelict bungalow, the Moon house, doesn't seem to be exactly where I remember.

Music: Cautious, rolling guitar chords.

FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE 104.3

FROM BLACK.

**EXT. PALEONTOLOGY CENTRE / INT. PALEONTOLOGY CENTRE -
EVENING - D3**

A truck COASTS up the winding road that leads to the Paleontology Centre.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* For the second time in as many days, I find myself speeding up the long, winding road into the ruddy mesas that surround the city, to the Paleontology Centre. It's apparently where I go when I'm running out of options. Or, just running.

The truck PARKS, its door opening and SLAMMING shut.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* As I walk under the life-sized stegosaurus that watches over the centre's wide, hexagonal visitor entrance, it looks like the "temporarily closed" sign is still taped to the inside of the front doors, already collecting dust and bleaching in the sun.

I double-check the number Strathcona put into my phone, and call.

The call RINGS, attempting to connect. Someone PICKS UP surprisingly quickly.

DR. GILLESPIE: *(On the phone)* No Strathcona, the Centre isn't open yet. No, not even the gift shop, thank you for checking in, have a nice day, buh-bye!

SUNNY: Woah, woah, woah! Hold on, this isn't Strathcona.

DR. GILLESPIE: *(Reassessing)* Oh. Oh my goodness. Oh no. Who is it, then?

SUNNY: My name is Sunny. I'm looking to speak with someone at the Paleontology Centre?

DR. GILLESPIE: That's me, Doctor Gillespie. Um. *(Sucking teeth.)* But I won't be of much help. The Centre is closed.

SUNNY: Yes, so you said, and I very much heard you —

DR. GILLESPIE: Super closed.

SUNNY: Yeah, I know, you —

DR. GILLESPIE: Close-a-rooni. Oh my gosh I can't believe how closed we are! Thank you for calling anyways, try again tomorrow, bye!

The call ends with a chipper CLICK, leaving SUNNY alone outside the Centre once again.

SUNNY: No — ! (*Frustrated growl*)

Out here, the town is barely a memory, the endless rocky Badlands pressing in so much hotter and closer. Outside the centre, the WIND is harsh and cutting, SCOURING the parking lot with sand.

After a moment's recalculation, SUNNY KNOCKS. The BEATING on the glass door of the centre comes like a bolt from the blue.

SUNNY: Come on, come on, come on, come...oh.

The grand glass door CREAKS open, swinging in on a rickety automatic mechanism. For a moment, SUNNY can only stand in minor shock, until they take a STEP into the chilly, wide-open space. Their FOOTSTEPS ricochet off the marble floors and glass cases, all too loud in this forbidden space.

SUNNY: Why does no one in this town lock their doors?

(*Calling out*) Dr. Gillespie?

...I mean, at this point, I'm just...checking to see if he's okay, right? Someone should tell him about the door and (*relenting*) I'm coming inside.

Music: Lost, gentle guitar strums, like drops of rain.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* The Centre could definitely use a reno, it hasn't changed a bit since my last visit as a child. It's all cheap wood, smudged glass, and huge round pedestals displaying some smaller specimens: drops of amber suspended in resin, a petrified stump of wood in stripes of dusty rose, even a few iridescent ammonites, their oilslick whorls glinting as I pass.

At the back of the foyer is a monument to Cretaceous death, and the Centre's pride and joy: a near-complete skeleton of an Albertosaurus, one of the huge meat-eater dinosaurs discovered right here in the Badlands. It's displayed in the same pose it died in, spine twisting, neck craning back as if to nip its own splintered tail. The fossilised bones are coal-coloured from the local sediment, and its jaws are cracked almost painfully wide.

SUNNY: *(Calling out)* Hello? Hello! I...um...I'm a researcher, I'd like to speak to one of your staff about the closure!

(Under breath, sing-song) I have a spooky video to show you?

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* This place was always small. It started back when fossils were getting turfed up every other week, as a research laboratory for new specimens to be safely cleaned, studied, bagged and tagged before getting shipped off to various glittering museums. A little government funding meant they could beef up their equipment, but they had to slap an interpretive centre on the front of the research lab, in an attempt to bring in some tourist dollars.

With no one to greet me in reception, I edge past the contorted Albertosaurus and into the hallway beyond.

Faintly, a mild but pervasive RINGING has bloomed in the air, beckoning SUNNY deeper into the centre even as they're unaware of it.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* I keep thinking I can hear something...something just past the turn at the hallway's end...

As they NEAR the end of the hallway, the RINGING intensifies, bringing a dark HUMMING TENSION with it...

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* At the end of the hall, I turn, following the sound, and see...

A window: not to the outside, but to another, larger room. There's equipment and tools everywhere. I think it's a laboratory, though all the lights are turned way down, with only a single lamp illuminating the work bench nearest the window.

Ever so slightly, the RINGING spikes.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* I blink: there's something on the bench. Silent, still, dead. It's covered entirely by a thick sheet of protective canvas, the frayed edges blowing eerily in the wind of some unseen aircon unit.

I can't even guess as to the true shape of it, but...it is *massive*.

DR. GILLESPIE: *(Distant, angry)* Hey!

SUNNY: *(Startled gasp)* I'm sorry, I —

The FOOTSTEPS begin distantly, but the irritated urgency in them is loud and clear.

DR. GILLESPIE: Oh no, no no no no no no! Get out, we are closed, the Centre is *closed*.

SUNNY: Wait wait wait, Doctor Gillespie, we just spoke on the phone, I'm Sunny —

DR. GILLESPIE: Which means you were lurking right outside the whole time? That is excruciatingly creepy! I would really love it if you stopped sneaking around here like some fossil thief, thank you. *How did you even get in here?*

SUNNY: Well. Funny story, your door was unlocked.

DR. GILLESPIE: Wow. So doors are just open and you just walk through them. I deal with enough things around the Badlands and *now* —

SUNNY: Hey, look, no, really, I apologize! And I'm happy to leave, it's just that...well, ah. I'm a private investigator on a local case in town.

DR. GILLESPIE: A private investigator? What are you investigating? Why is it private? Are you investigating *me*?

SUNNY: No! Actually, I'm seeking expert opinions. I just have some evidence related to my case that I want to run by you. Or, I mean, any paleontologist, really. Is it...just you here?

DR. GILLESPIE: *(Suddenly deflated)* Yes, it's just me. What were you asking about, again?

SUNNY: Just this video. It features a person of interest in my case; a paleontologist, I think. And I was hoping that you knew them, or maybe that you could point me in their direction?

DR. GILLESPIE: That's it? You...just want me to watch a video? And then you'll leave?

SUNNY: Yes, sure, absolutely! Let's make it a deal.

DR. GILLESPIE: I guess I can do that. I can watch a video, and then you can *get out of here*.

SUNNY: Great! Great. Thank you so much.

Okay, so, my handler will rip me a new one if I show you the whole thing, so I'll just give you the first few seconds. Here...

SUNNY procures their phone. The VIDEO from Episode 2 plays, its sound TINNY in the tense space.

JASPER: *(On video)* So you *are* curious about what we've built, Doctor?

SECOND SPEAKER: *(On video)* -Not even a little bit. Because I know that your claims are utter nonsense.

JASPER MOON: *(On video)* Would you like to see the fossils? We don't have them all just yet, but enough to proceed, I feel.

SECOND SPEAKER: *(On video)* Whatever proceedings you have planned, it's all just cultic pageantry —

We FADE FORWARD. At video's end, SILENCE expands between PI and scientist. After an uncomfortably long time...

SUNNY: *(Uncertain)* Uh. Do you want me to replay it?

DR. GILLESPIE: *(Quiet, tense)* No. You didn't tell me you were investigating Jasper Moon.

SUNNY: You recognize Moon in that?

DR. GILLESPIE: No. But I do recognize Doctor Levesque. He was the only other paleontologist here.

SUNNY: I knew it. And he knew Jasper Moon? Oh, this is big. Um, is there any chance you could point me in his direction? I really need to speak with him.

DR. GILLESPIE: There's no chance whatsoever. He's dead.

SUNNY: Oh, I — Doctor, I really didn't —

DR. GILLESPIE: *(Strained)* The centre is closed. It's time for you to go.

SUNNY: Look, if Moon hurt your friend in some way, then maybe I can —

DR. GILLESPIE: I said, the centre is *closed*. *Get out*.

FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE 104.4

FROM BLACK.

EXT. TOWN STREETS - NIGHT - D3

Music: Lonely, mournful chords on a grungy rock guitar. It seems to be playing from a truck radio, providing a spacey backing track to SUNNY's thoughts...

The DRIVE back down from the centre is faster, the heat BLASTING now that the desert night has settled in.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* By the time I make it back to town, night has settled in hard, and my thoughts are tumbling like street lamp moths. Make a report to Nicholson, see if they've caught Jasper Moon yet, take some notes on the Paleontology Centre and their connection to a potential member of the Moon cult, confirm the actual goddamn existence of a sister.

Her name is Melinda. Mel. She's real.

I take the right turn into the town proper, then right again at the decrepit blue-hatted pterodactyl statue, down the pothole road that leads to the Comfortina. Except this isn't the road that leads to the Comfortina. Takes me three blocks to realise I'm somehow headed back out to the highway, no flickering motel neon in sight.

It's easy enough to pull a quick illegal u-turn and get back on track. ...Less easy to realise that the road back is even less familiar.

I wait to pass the pterodactyl again. The one with the hat. It never comes.

I chalk it up to exhaustion, and do my best not to rage out at the steering wheel. Where the hell is the Comfortina?

I circle back and forth, coasting down main street, scanning for signs and landmarks. Until my sleep-deprived eyes snag on the biggest landmark of all in this town.

And I stare. I can't look away.

The music on the RADIO becomes quiet and thick, STATICKY, though SUNNY doesn't seem to notice...

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* There's something wrong with the Big Dinosaur.

I can barely pick the shape of it out against the deep, starless black of the sky, but even from this far away, I can tell it...has two heads.

No. Not two heads. Two *jaws*, the lower mandibles stretched and twisted to form a single grotesque mouth, twice the size of the viewpoint where Strathcona and I were standing...just hours ago. The double-mouth hangs open at a heavy, torturous angle, fibreglass structure cracking at the corners, in a gaping pastiche of a roar, or an unfed smile.

The static rises to a painful PEAK, swallowing up all noise before cutting out completely.

...The music on the RADIO returns, this time to the chipper music that accompanies STRATHCONA's radio addresses.

SUNNY: *(To the audience)* No. I'm hungry. I haven't eaten all day, and my blood sugar is low, and *that*...that's why I'm seeing... A hypoglycemic fever dream. The Big Dinosaur does not have two heads; I just need to eat. Shit, is anything even open this late?

STRATHCONA: *(On radio)* Good evening, friends, family and enemies about town. Time for another Raptor update: my tomato plants are dead. You might be thinking: Strathcona, you killed your succulents, you killed your air plants, you killed your cactus, why would you think this would turn out any different, you tragic man?

Listen, things were just going really well and I got attached. Not the only thing of mine I had torn out of my hands this weekend, but that, my darlings, is a story for another week.

Stay tuned after this next track and I'll tell you about two things you actually care about: the start time for the Blue Dunes pancake breakfast later this week, and the official winners of the yard sale wars. *(Humourless)* Woo.

Music: Another grungy guitar song, warbling and vulnerable.

SUNNY DIALS a familiar number into their phone: this time their call is picked up on the second RING.

STRATHCONA: *(Over the phone)* Burning the midnight oil, investigator? Or are you just real fired up about pancakes and yard sales?

SUNNY: How do you always know it's me?

STRATHCONA: Because no one calls a radio station unless there's a free keychain involved. Or a yard sale. What's up?

SUNNY: Um. How many heads does the Big Dinosaur have?

STRATHCONA: ...Are you drunk-dialing me?

SUNNY: No! It's...nothing, nevermind.

Listen: I dug up a lead at the Paleontology Centre. I think. I might have something...I just don't know what it is, and I'm too tired and hungry to figure it out.

STRATHCONA: Wait, did you eat anything today?

SUNNY: *(Embarrassed, irritated)* No.

STRATHCONA: *(Whistles)* Jesus, you are a gross workaholic nightmare.

(Deep breath) All right. Yeah. Head over to Jay's Drive-In Diner.

SUNNY: Drive-In?

STRATHCONA: Yes, I'll catch you there. Let's see if you're any good at your job.

The call ENDS. The music does not.

CREDITS: "Badlands Cola" is written, directed, and produced by Renee Taylor Klint. This episode was sound designed and mixed by Russ More, and featured the voice talents of Liz Morey, Briggon Snow, Elvis Barkdale II, Ron Guan, and Dustin Vuong Nguyen. Special thanks to our Artists' Representative, Giancarlo Herrera. Visit badlandscola.com and follow BadlandsCola on Twitter for show notes, announcements, behind the scenes content, and more.

Good night.

END OF EPISODE

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